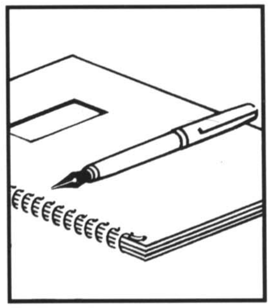
Heritage Notes

Planning for Historic Resources



Number 2

How to Hire a Consultant

David Lapp

Choosing the right consultant depends upon the nature of the project.

During the course of the development of a heritage site, there may arise situations which require expertise beyond that of the members of the sponsoring organization. In such cases, it may be necessary to turn to a professional consultant. The consultant may be either an individual or a team assembled to meet the special demands of your particular project.

The process of hiring a consultant for a project may at first appear to be daunting. However, it is worth the effort, for by following the process as it is explained here, you will go a long way towards ensuring that your needs as clients are met.

In the case of public planning projects, the staff of the Historic Sites and Archives Service of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism will be available to provide advice and counselling. Nevertheless, there are many steps in the hiring process which the client group must consider and act on.

Identification of the Issue

The first step in the process is to identify the need for a consultant by defining the issues to be addressed. This will not only assist in providing the details for the **terms of reference** document, but will help determine the specific consulting expertise needed.

Alberta Historical Resources Foundation

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For example, if the project involves the restoration of a historic structure, the consultant will likely be an architect with experience in historic preservation. If the project is to preserve an archaeological site for public benefit, the consultant should be an archaeologist with experience at similar sites.

Staff with Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism maintain up-to-date lists of consultants who have expertise in many fields related to historical and archaeological resources.

Intent and Scope

It is necessary to define both the purpose of the consulting project and the breadth of its focus. For example, is the intent to restore a historic structure in order to serve its original function? Or is it to incorporate the restored historic structure into a new visitor attraction? The project may be in the initial Feasibility Study phase or it may be further advanced in a Construction or Implementation phase. The scope of the project should also be determined. It may require short term development or phased development over an extensive period of time.

Terms of Reference

Once the issues are identified, developing the terms of reference for the project is the next step. Because of the importance of the exercise, the client should be prepared to devote considerable time in order to incorporate all of the relevant information into this document. The terms of reference not only identifies the reason, intent and scope of the study for the consultant, it also delineates the working procedures. Furthermore, it establishes the information parameters within which the client can evaluate the consultants who enter the competition for the project.

Put simply, the terms of reference enable the client to tell the consultant what is wanted for the project. The proposals which are received in response will enable the client to judge which consultant both understands and is capable of meeting those requirements. While it may appear to be an easy exercise for consultants, the variation in the quality of proposals is considerable. However, this frequently makes the consultant selection process easier.

The terms of reference should contain the following information:

- introduction
- study organization
- study area definition
- background
- objective
- project requirements
- documentation
- budget
- completion date
- proposal evaluation criteria
- other conditions

A covering letter is sent out with the terms of reference, introducing the client group and identifying the purpose or intent of the study or project. The terms of reference document itself should provide all of the background information the consultants need to determine what should be presented in their proposals.

Introduction

In the introduction, the client group introduce themselves to the prospective consultants and provide a brief background to the project. The consultant is informed of the nature of the expected product, e.g. Feasibility Study, Architectural Assessment and so forth.

The introduction also indicates the due date for proposals, the number of copies required and to whom they should be submitted. In this way, if any are late there is a specific measure to determine their admissibility.

Study Area Definition

Often accompanied by a map, this section describes the physical extent of the area in question. It may focus on historic structures on a few hundred square metres of land or it could incorporate several hectares, depending on the scope of the study.

Background

This section explains the reason for the current study or project. Here the consultant is informed of the issues requiring investigation or resolution. There may even be a certain amount of direction given to the consultant as to the area the client wishes the consultant to focus his/her efforts. This may be historic structure restoration, historical research, archaeological excavation, tourism planning, marketing, economic forecasting, etc.

Objective

The purpose the study is intended to serve is stated in this section. For example, let us assume a historic structure requires restoration work and the client desires the restored structure to generate enough revenue to cover annual operating and maintenance costs. The objective for the study could be stated in this way:

The study will identify the procedure necessary and the costs involved to restore the historic structure to a state consistent with the period when it was in regular use. The study will, as a result of tourism market analysis, identify uses for the structure which would generate enough revenue annually to absorb operations and maintenance costs. Any possible uses for the structure which would require physical changes must be rejected, as they would affect the structure's historic significance and be incompatible with its historic nature.

Client/Consultant Reporting Relationship

This section of the terms of reference establishes how the study will be conducted. Often a steering committee is established for studies, which consists of representatives of the group or groups interested in having such a study produced. The steering committee will review and approve invoices for expenses and fees as well as issue payments. All reports, whether interim or draft, will be reviewed by such a committee. Their comments or concerns will then be conveyed to the consultant through a designated contact person. This group could also act as an interview team.

Project Requirements

Depending on the nature or scope of the project, this section can be reasonably brief or very detailed. For the project of broad scope, which might involve numerous areas of expertise (e.g. architecture, restoration, construction, historical research, tourism planning, marketing assessment, etc.) more specific requirements may be desired to provide clear guidance for potential consultants.

The basic points which should be covered here include:

- an indication of the detail required in the consultant's work program, such as all component tasks and their interrelationship; points in the work program for interim review and approval; all meetings with the consultant which the client considers necessary
- the type of information and data available to the consultant. This would save the consultant from doing unnecessary research and the client the expense of paying for it
- any specific study framework the client wishes the consultant to work within, for example, a particular reporting procedure or framework for the final report
- any requirement to produce an inventory of related resources, whether they be associated

historic resources or tourism services and attractions nearby

- an assessment of important resources (e.g. related historic resources)
- an analysis of the condition of the historic structure, if restoration is a consideration
- a strategy for restoration work, including estimated costs for materials and labour
- options for viable uses of the restored structure
- total estimated project costs, including suggestions of funding sources
- an indication of the time frame involved to carry out such a project, including suggestions for phased development

Documentation

This is the section where the specific requirements for the written reports and related graphics are stated. The majority of reports are typed/word processed on 8 1/2 by 11 inch white bond paper and bound on the left hand margin by plastic coil (cerlox) binding.

The client can be specific about the number of interim reports required and the number of copies required of each, including the final report. This factor is based on the size of the client group, whether general public distribution of the report will occur and the cost of reproducing the report.

Usually, detailed plans, sketches, charts and architectural drawings appear only in the final report. Concept sketches may be reviewed at intervals in the course of the project. If deemed necessary, specific dimensions and standard formats can be indicated as required, particularly if drawings must be used for project approvals by regulatory agencies.

It should clearly be stated in the terms of reference that all background reports, maps, photographs and sketches purchased or reproduced by the consultant and charged to the study budget are the property of the client and must be surrendered to the client at the conclusion of the study. Similarly, all negatives of photographs taken by the consultant for the study must also be surrendered.

Budget

With regards to setting a budget, there are three basic schools of thought. One approach is to set a specific budget, so that the consultant knows what he or she has to work with and can determine where efforts and finances should be focussed. This approach is often favoured when foundations or other granting agencies are paying for the study. However, very often consultants adjust their expenses and fees to meet or nearly match the upset budget identified.

Another approach is to identify no specific budget. In this scenario, the intent is to see what each consultant proposes, what the various tasks will cost and compare these against the bids of other consultants.

The third possibility is to set a range for the budget. For example, a small feasibility study could have a budget range of $12,000 to $15,000.

Schedule

The schedule should provide the consultant with the overall time frame within which the client expects all the tasks to be performed.

Other Conditions

In this section, other considerations which do not fit into any other category should be noted. Very often, consultants hire (subcontract) another consultant to provide a specific area of expertise for part of the project. The simplest way to deal with subcontracting is to state clearly that fees for the services of any other consultant obtained by subletting any part of the contract should be the responsibility of the prime consultant.

While there are a lot of factors to consider here, some level of attention to detail at the outset (when the terms of reference are being drawn up) will make subsequent steps in the hiring process much easier.

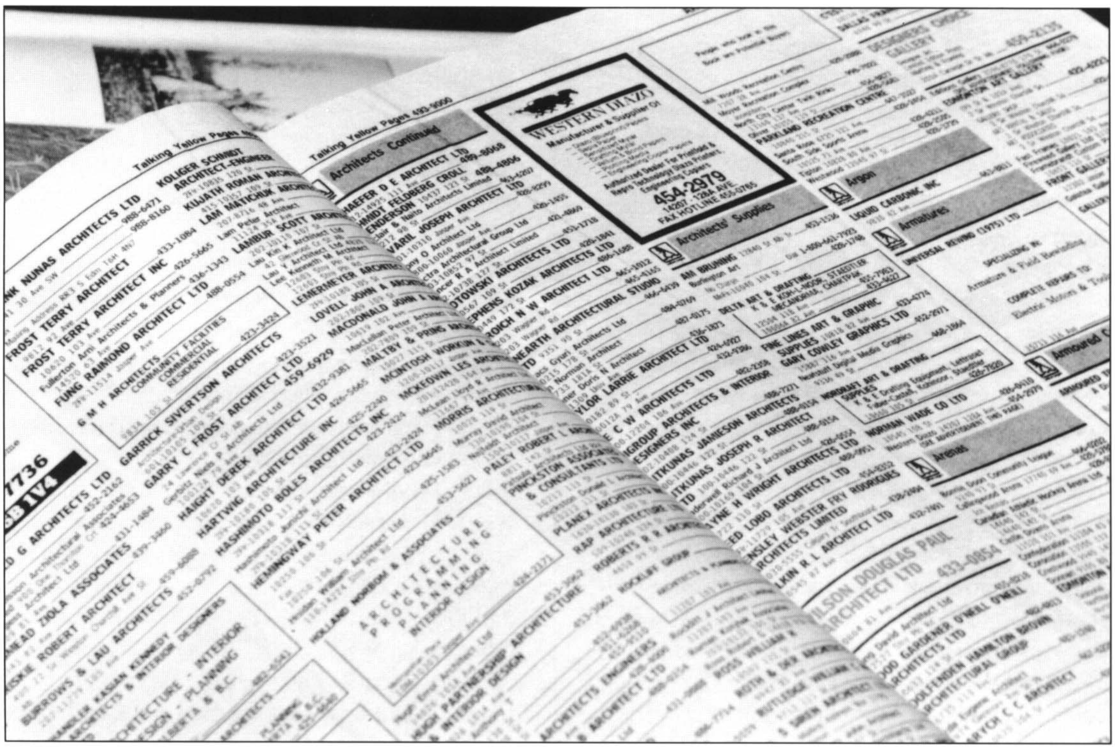
Consultant List

If the desire is to obtain as many proposals as possible, advertise in the local media. In cases where many proposals have been requested or are expected, a two stage proposal process may be employed. In this process candidates are invited to submit a statement of interest which contains a brief description of the qualifications and experience of their company. A short list of preferred candidates can then be selected based on their suitability for the project in question. This process has the advantage of reducing the consultants' time spent in proposal preparation and the client's time in reviewing full length proposals.

When the budget for the study is fixed, the client may wish to review only a limited number of proposals. The preferred course of action is to contact a specific number of consultants and invite them to submit a proposal. The terms of reference should be included.

Consultant lists can be developed by gathering names of firms listed in the yellow pages of the telephone directory or by contacting a particular professional association and asking for lists of names of local members. The Alberta Association of Architects, the Alberta Association of Landscape Architects and the Alberta Association of the Canadian Institute of Planners all maintain up-to-date membership lists.

Another solution, especially if the client is maintaining a close liaison with the Historical Resources staff of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, is to ask them for suggestions. Both the Historic Sites and Archives Service and the Archaeological Survey, Provincial Museum of Alberta maintain regularly up-dated consultant lists, categorized by area of expertise.



The list of possible consultants for the proposal call can be drawn up by contacting a professional organization, such as the Alberta Association of Architects, or even by checking the Yellow Pages.

The client group must evaluate each proposal, according to how well the consultants meet the criteria set out in the terms of reference document. Evaluation sheets, such as the examples given in Tables 1 and 2, are helpful.

For a study in the $15,000 to $20,000 range, requesting submissions from five to ten consultants should be sufficient.

Call for Proposals

Once a list of consultants is drawn up, initial contact can be made with each firm. The terms of reference for the project will suffice to allow them to determine whether they wish to submit a proposal.

Usually, a period of at least two weeks is allowed for the consultants to put together proposals for submission. During this time, consultants may wish to clarify points in the terms of reference.

The introduction section of the terms of reference specifies when and where proposals must be submitted. This can certainly be reinforced in the covering letter which is sent to the consultant with the terms of reference. The client may wish to specify to whom the consultant's queries should be directed while proposals are being prepared. One point of contact for all consultants ensures that the answers to their questions will be consistent.

Proposal Evaluation

The division of the proposed study into tasks and methods of meeting the client's detailed requirements should form a significant portion of the consultant's proposal.

The consultant should provide the following as part of the proposal: a concise outline of the work to be done, including interim reports to be produced, review stages for interim reports, community/public input sessions (if necessary) and meetings with the client. The consultant must also draw up a project schedule outlining the time frames, a sequence of events and study stages. He or she should provide an indication of the professional staff involved in the project and the amount of time that each will spend in a particular project area. This should include each staff member's assigned role in the project, the anticipated hours of work and a fee schedule on a per diem basis, which should be co-ordinated with the budget portion of the proposal. This is where the importance of the level of detail provided by the consultant in the proposal is revealed. That level may largely hinge upon the level of detail requested by the client in the terms of reference. In a situation where two consultants demonstrate the same level of understanding of the project and have similar levels of expertise, detailed information on costs and man-hours could very likely tip the balance in favour of one consultant or another.

The cost of reproduction should be written into the consultant's proposal costs, unless the client is willing to be responsible for the report production as a separate consideration.

Be prepared for all manner of proposals, both long and short. However, length is no guarantee that relevant details will be included. For example, some proposals run to two volumes, the first being devoted entirely to every project that the firm's parent office has ever been involved in, rather than only the relevant projects. Also, be prepared for the succinct letter which states: "We are able to complete all of the tasks listed in your terms of reference for the total budget identified." Proposals like these make the evaluation simple. Even if a firm is known to be eminently qualified to conduct the study, it must be clearly reflected in the proposal submitted.

While the evaluation of the proposals which have been submitted can be a difficult process, it is made easier if the client has already determined which elements of the proposals are most important, in terms of information requested. For example, related experience may be considered important but the client may feel that an understanding of what he or she wants as a final product is more significant.

One useful way in which to evaluate proposals is to establish criteria for evaluation and assign weights to each one in terms of their relative importance. The first example, Table 1, has assigned weights in such a way that fees and

Table 1
RATING SCHEDULE

ITEM	ASSIGNED WEIGHT (A)	UNIT POINTS AWARDED (B)	TOTAL POINTS	REMARKS
1. Project team – personnel to be assigned or made available to the project	20			
2. Methodology or approach proposed by firm	15			
3. Past relevant experience	15			
4. Project schedule	10			
5. Fees and expenses as compared to estimate	25			
6. Past performance appraisals	15			
TOTAL	100	N/A	TS	

Table 2

FIRM ____________________

CRITICAL:

1. METHODOLOGY
   - level of understanding of project objectives and requirements ____ /10

2. WORK PLAN/SCHEDULE
   - completeness ____ /10
   - conformity with project time frame
   - appropriateness of time allocated to specific tasks
   - ease of client control

3. EXPERIENCE
   - proven capability in field of historic resource site planning ____ /10
   - appropriate knowledge, skills, training of personnel

4. FEE
   - product proposed is in line with budget firm proposes and is neither more nor less than could be anticipated for proposed budget ____ /10

SUMMARY

FIRM ____________________

1. METHODOLOGY	/10 X	________	=	________
2. WORK PLAN	/10 X	________	=	________
3. EXPERIENCE	/10 X	________	=	________
4. FEE	/10 X	________	=	________
TOTAL				________

Reference check

- work relationship with client
- satisfaction with product
- conformity to schedule/budget

expenses are considered most important, followed by the project team for the study. Project schedule is considered least important. Using these examples as a guide, the client can reassign the weighting based on what is most important for the individual project. Table 2 provides an alternative evaluation sheet, which allows the client to assign his or her own weighted values to the criteria.

For each item or criterion, the person reviewing the proposal usually awards a value from 0 to 10 (10 being the highest) based on how well the consultant's proposal has dealt with it. The two values, (the point value awarded multiplied by the assigned weight) make up the point for each of the criteria. These points, when added together, provide a total score for each proposal submitted.

Once all proposals have been evaluated and scored, there are two options. One is to reduce the list of potential consultants by dropping the firms which scored low on the evaluation. The client may wish to consider seriously only the three best proposals from the five to ten submitted. These three firms could then be invited for an interview with the steering committee (See section on Client/Consultant Reporting Relationship.)

The other possibility is simply to select the top ranked consultant, based upon the proposal evaluation. This is usually the case when five or fewer proposals have been submitted. While this may speed up the selection process, there can be drawbacks. For example, while the consultant may look good on paper, he or she may reveal a definite lack of people skills in an interview situation. Or the client may learn through in-depth questioning at the interview that the consultant is not as familiar with the type of project as the proposal implied.

It should be noted that the evaluation process is subjective. However, with set criteria and assigned weights established beforehand, all proposals will be given virtually equal consideration.

During the interviews of the short-listed consultants, the client group takes the screening process one step further. On completion, the interviews themselves should be evaluated, using criteria such as are given in Table 3.

Table 3
INTERVIEW - EVALUATION CRITERIA

NAME OF STUDY ____________________

NAME OF CONSULTANT(S) ____________________

DATE ____________________

MEMBER OF INTERVIEW BOARD ____________________

PARAMETERS	PTS	WT	SCORE	COMMENTS
1. Related Experience (firm and individuals)	6	10		
2. Project Team Composition	6	10		
3. Does the team appear to work as a team? Know each other's expertise and experience?	6	10		
4. Planning Program				
- Soundness of Planning	6	10		
- Methodology				
- Component Emphasis	5	10		
5. Does the firm fully understand what we want?	7	8		
6. Understanding of Study Areas	7	10		
7. Understanding of existing policies or regulations which could impact on the project	8	5		
8. Cost and timing relative to quality	4	10		
9. Attitude and level of enthusiasm	8	5		
10. Quality of verbal presentation	8	10		
11. Client interface – Can we work with the firm?	6	8		
12. Can the firm work with local people?	7	8		
PTS - Points WT - Weighting	______	______		

Other Comments (Wt. 10; Pts. 1-10)

Rating

Decision

Those firms which were not selected for interviews should be contacted to inform them of that decision. The client should be prepared to answer questions from consultants who have been unsuccessful. The client's response to the disappointed consultant should be derived from the evaluation of the proposal.

Interviews

Advance preparation for the interview is strongly advised. Poorly planned interviewers invariably end up asking the same questions as were presented in the terms of reference. Questions at the interview should be based on the following factors:

- obtaining more detail on the consultant's planned methodology for carrying out the study
- asking specific questions which arose while reviewing the proposal or seeking information which was lacking in the proposal.
- determining the consultant's flexibility in terms of his or her willingness to change the focus of his or her efforts to meet the conditions of the proposal more closely.

The client can also delve deeper into the consultant's related experience, requesting the details on a specific project listed in the proposal which relates to the project in question.

The interview should be seen as simply another step in the screening process. It is one more opportunity to evaluate the consultants. And, similar to the evaluation of the proposals, the consultant interviews should also be evaluated.

Interview Evaluation

The evaluation of the interview follows the same procedure as that for proposals. In the case of interviews, the questions asked constitute the items or criteria. Again, weights should be assigned to each item based on its perceived value.

Table 3 is another model for evaluation, which places high weights on the consultant's understanding of the study area, the quality of the verbal presentation, planning programme, consultant team composition and experience. The client may wish to place greater weight on such attributes as understanding of the client's needs, client interface or the ability to work with local people.

Once the contract with the successful consultant has been approved, work on the project can begin.

From the scores derived from this evaluation, it should be possible to select the consultant the client feels would best be able to handle the project. If two firms are virtually tied after the evaluation (which can happen) another interview could be arranged with each firm. In this case, a new set of questions should be devised and the firms should then be evaluated on their responses.

Once again, contact the unsuccessful firms and be prepared to inform them of the reasons they were not selected.

Contract Negotiaton

The client should now be able to contact the selected consultant and offer the project to him or her. If the consultant accepts, the matter of a contract should be discussed and negotiated.

The consultant's proposal and the terms of reference document usually form part of the contract but clauses should be added which clearly state the length of time of the contract and the total budget. The contract should assign responsibility for supervision of the project. Premature termination of the project and the matter of a hold back on final payment should also be included in the contract. The hold back is usually set at 10% of professional fees. This will help guarantee that all conditions of the study contract have been met to the client's satisfaction before final payment is made to the consultant. Staff from the Historic Sites and Archives Service of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism may assist in drafting a contract.

Both parties, client and consultant, should be comfortable with the terms and conditions of the contract. Therefore, the client should be prepared for a period of review and negotiation to reach a consensus.

Begin the Project

With a consultant selected and a contract approved, the work of the consultant can begin.

Good Luck!

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Heritage Notes are intended to provide guidance on a range of topics in the field of historic resource management to the people of Alberta. Readers' comments on the series are welcome. For more information or to order, please write to:
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